



# CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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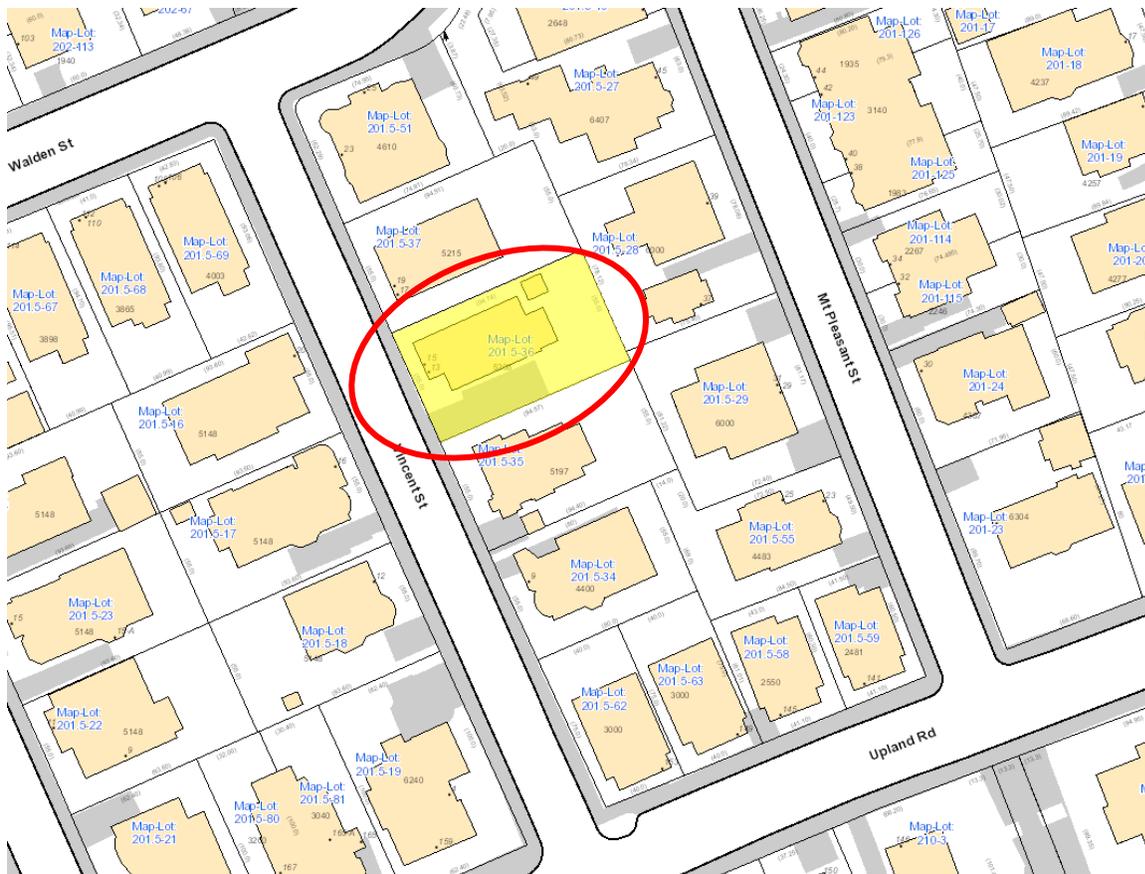
June 2, 2018

To: Members of the Historical Commission  
From: Charles Sullivan  
Re: D-1485: Nelson-Byars house, 13-15 Vincent Street (1924)

An application to demolish the structure at 13-15 Vincent Street was received on May 17, 2018. The applicant was notified of an initial determination of significance and a public hearing was scheduled for June 7.

## Site

The structure, a two-story, two-family dwelling, is located on the east side of Vincent Street between Walden Street and Upland Road.



13-15 Vincent Street.

Cambridge GIS, Assessor's map

The house is sited on a 5,205 square-foot lot in a Residence C-1 district. This is a multi-family residential district, which permits an FAR of .75 and has a height limit of 35 feet. The assessed value of the property, according to the online assessor's property database, is \$1,242,200, with \$492,300 attributable to the building (Map 201.5/Parcel 36).



13-15 Vincent Street. June 2013.

Assessing Dept. photo

The neighboring properties include a similar 1925 two-story duplex at 17-19 Vincent Street next door. The rest of Vincent Street, however, was built up with much more elaborate Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses in 1894-1901.

### Description

The building at 13-15 Vincent Street is a two-story side-hall house with a gable roof built in 1924. The original wood shingled exterior is concealed by white vinyl siding with plastic shutters. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The foundation is concrete block. A driveway is located to the south of the house. All the windows appear to have been replaced.

The shingled simplicity of the house as originally constructed owes more to the Bungalow style than to any other; the exposed rafter tails are a telling detail of this style. The principal feature of the facade, the enclosed two-story porch, may have been built as an open porch.



15 Vincent Street, 1973

CHC photo

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The owner proposes to demolish the house and construct two attached single-family houses with off-street parking.

### History

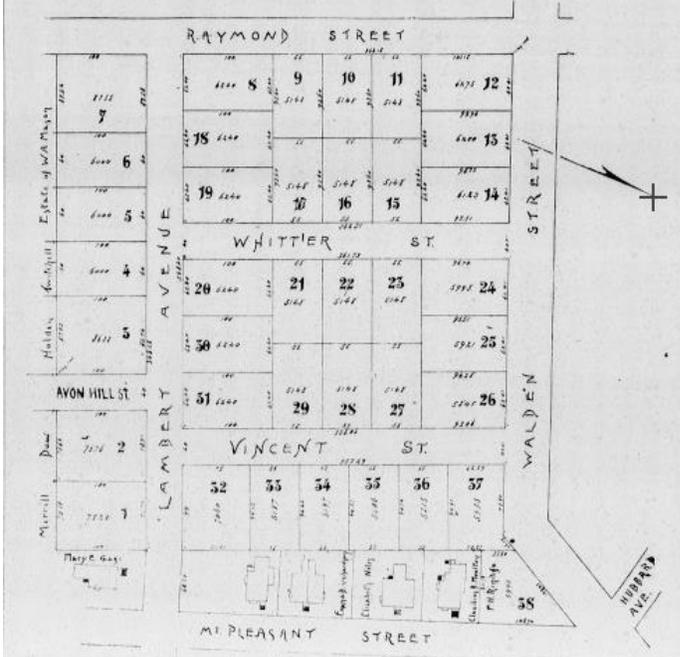
The 1842 extension of the Charlestown Branch Railroad from the Miller's River to Fresh Pond opened up North Cambridge for the brick and ice industries and for suburban development. The area that is now traversed by upper Raymond Street was rich in clay deposits; most of the north slope of Avon Hill between Raymond and Sherman Streets, including today's Raymond Street Park, was originally mined by local brick makers, like the New England Brick Company, and by A. H. Hews & Co., which made clay flower pots.

## DIAGRAM OF Choice Building Lots for Sale

On Cambridge Heights, bordering on Raymond, Walden, Vincent  
and Whittier Streets, and Lambert Avenue.

THE PROPERTY OF MR. F. H. RINDGE.

W. I. PARKER, Agent, 27 Kilby Street, Boston



The tract between Raymond and Mt. Pleasant Streets that is now crossed by Vincent and Whittier Streets was owned in 1873 by Horace Saunders, a real estate dealer. Saunders went bankrupt a few years later, and the property passed through Samuel B. Rindge's estate to Frederick Hastings Rindge. Working with other investors, Rindge subdivided the property in 1888 and arranged for the city to construct sewers and accept Vincent and Whittier streets as surveyed for him by William A. Mason. (Rindge had relocated to California in 1887; his longtime agent, William I. Parker, handled his New England affairs.)

Cambridge Tribune, April 12, 1890

Rindge's 37-lot subdivision on Cambridge Heights (as Avon Hill was then called) sold well until the Panic of 1893 halted most real estate activity. Three Colonial Revival houses were constructed on Vincent Street in 1894-95 by architects Lois Lilley Howe, S.S. Woodcock, and William H. McGinty. Two houses followed in 1898 and 1901; one of these, at 20 Vincent, was a shingled Tudor-style house by architect Samuel J. Brown. The two remaining vacant lots on Vincent Street and several more on Walden Street remained unbuilt for more than twenty years.



12 Vincent Street (1894, W. H. McGinty, architect)



20 Vincent St. (1901, S. J. Brown)

When development resumed after World War I the market favored less-expensive two-family houses in the much less elaborate Bungalow or Four Square styles. The adjoining vacant lots at 13-15 and 17-19 Vincent, along with four more at 106-108 through 120 Walden Street, were filled with two-family houses in 1925-25. Although the two 1924-25 houses on Vincent are similar, they were put up by different owners and by different designers.

Building permit records list the original owner of 13-15 Vincent as Thomas G. Nelson, about whom nothing could be found. According to Cambridge newspapers, the house was completed by October 1924. It changed hands rapidly; in February 1925 it was reported that David O'Brien had sold it to Henry Weiss, another investor. Early tenants included Irving Whittemore, a public school teacher, Margaret Farrington, a widow, and Henry Trefrey, a retired railroad conductor. In 1941 another absentee landlord, Elina Johnson, sold it to Anna Bespolka, a widow, whose son Elliott sold the property to George E. Byars Jr. in 1957.

George Byars, who lived in the house until his death in 1997, was a WWII veteran who entered the Cambridge Fire Department in 1951 and retired as a Lieutenant in 1979. He also worked as a housing code inspector for the Cambridge Health Department and the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority and was a founding member of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters.

#### Significance and Recommendation

I recommend that the building at 13-15 Vincent Street be found significant for its associations with the social and economic development of North Cambridge and in the context of the architecturally diverse Cambridge Heights subdivision of Whittier and Vincent Streets.

The Commission should hear testimony from the applicants and neighbors and review the plans for replacement construction before making a further determination.

cc: Matt Hayes